

Make Believe REAL Preschool

Maureen Carroll

Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford
451 Panama Mall
Stanford, CA 94305 USA
1 925 963 8596
carrollm@stanford.edu

Adam Royalty

Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford
451 Panama Mall
Stanford, CA 94305 USA
1 650 736 1025
adamroyalty@stanford.edu

C4C Como for Children Design Competition

INTRODUCTION Make Believe REAL Preschool

“Pietra and me are going treasure hunting at the reef.”

“No, John, come with us in the space ship!”

“Why don’t you stay here with me? I am making clay monster meatballs!”

The morning light is bright and inviting, and the smell of cinnamon, sizzling eggs and spicy frittatas fill the air. In the hub of *Make Believe REAL*, the preschoolers are sprawled across scrunchy mats, modular lime green tables, and spinning chairs. Some are eating, some are painting, and some are building. The walls of the hub begin to vibrate, and the electric vibraphone plays a familiar tune.

The children know that it is time to choose their daily Windaloobahs. Large panels illuminate the space, each filled with vibrant images. Bright blue phosphorescent algae illuminate the inky ocean water. Brave knights stand atop a crumbling castle wall in ancient Scotland. Branches hang low over the entry to a fort built with branches and the scent of honeysuckle fills the air.

The children know that it is browse time. A circular gallery of still paintings surrounds the space in each Windaloobah. Each scene features images of children from different countries and time zones playing in the space. Some are crayon sketches, some are graphics, and others are watercolors. Some have music and some have audio. All capture a history of how the children have played. The children know that they can only enter the Windaloobahs in teams of two. Excited conversations ensue.

“Look what Ami and Habib did to our black swords! They have lights on them now! I want to play with them!”

“I am calling Leticia to see if she is coming to the fort today. I am not going if she isn’t.”

“Did you see the new Windaloobah? It is a treehouse! You

can hear the tree frogs!

Once the children have decided, they walk through a foldable screen. They may feel wind at their feet, mist on their faces, or they may have to wade through slippery windows of moldable slime. They may experience a simulation or they may physically travel to new places. If they have chosen a simulation, they may experience wind gliders soaring over Antarctica with a team of four-year old pilots charting the course. They might construct sand castles that stretch sixty feet high as teams of builders use tools to sculpt sea urchins and crabs into their walls. If they are traveling, they might journey to a tide pool on a windy beach in northern California where video cameras embedded in their bright colored bandanas send images to the screens of remote users around the globe.

Two things are essential to preschool play: imagination and choice. The Windaloobah is an interactive environment that provides a play space that combines children engaged in real-time activities, remote users, interactions with others, and digital sets from across time. Today’s preschoolers pretend they are the kings and queens of the universe. Make Believe REAL preschoolers participate in simulated interactions where all the accoutrements of a castle surround them. They play with global classmates, design objects to play with, and leave their imprint on the Windaloobah for others to continue playing another day. The physical space provides both a place to play and a place to record how one has played and what one has played with. Vygotsky (1978) described how humans use cultural inventions, signs and tools to mediate their interactions with others and with their surroundings. A fundamental property of these instruments is that they are social in origin. First, they are used to communicate with others and to mediate contact with our social world, and later these instruments can come to mediate our interactions with self, as they can help us to think as we internalize their use.

Bakhtin (1986) describes how “our thought itself- philosophical, scientific, and artistic- is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought” (p. 92). Resnick (2008) describes how the proliferation of new technologies accentuates the need for creative thinking in all aspects of people’s lives and have the potential, if properly designed and used, to help people develop as creative thinkers, ideas, play with their

creations, share their ideas and creations with others, and reflect on their experiences. The children's experiences in the Windalobahs at the Make Believe REAL Preschool of the future function as a meditational tool for learning about their world and the worlds of others and to explore the boundaries of creativity. Come and play some day!

REFERENCES

1. Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays* (V. W. McGee Schwartz, M., and Task Force on Bias-Free Language. *Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN, 1995.
2. Resnick, M. (2008). Sowing the seeds for a more creative society. *Learning & Leading with Technology*
3. Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and Language* (A. Kozalin, Trans.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press